

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

In "The Watchman's Rattle", subtitled 'Thinking our way out of extinction', Rebecca Costa delivers a fascinating account of how civilisations die. Their problems become too complex. Societies reach what she calls a cognitive threshold. They simply can't chart a path from the present to the future.

The example she gives is the Mayans. For a period of three and a half thousand years, between 2,600 BCE and 900 CE, they developed an extraordinary civilisation, spreading over what is today Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize with an estimated population of 15 million people.

Not only were they master potters, weavers, architects and farmers. They developed an intricate cylindrical calendar system, with celestial charts to track the movements of the stars and predict weather patterns. They had their own unique form of writing as well as an advanced mathematical system. Most impressively they developed a water-supply infrastructure involving a complex network of reservoirs, canals, dams and levees.

Then suddenly, for reasons we still don't fully understand, the entire system collapsed. Sometime between the middle of the eighth and ninth century the majority of the Mayan people simply disappeared. There have been many theories as to why it happened. It may have been a prolonged drought, overpopulation, internecine wars, a devastating epidemic, food shortages, or a combination of these and other factors. One way or another, having survived for 35 centuries, Mayan civilisation failed and became extinct.

Rebecca Costa's argument is that whatever the causes, the Mayan collapse, like the fall of the Roman Empire, and the Khmer Empire of thirteenth century Cambodia, occurred because problems became too many and complicated for the people of that time and place to solve. There was cognitive overload, and systems broke down.

It can happen to any civilisation. It may, she says, be happening to ours. The first sign of breakdown is gridlock. Instead of dealing with what everyone can see are major problems, people continue as usual and simply pass their problems on to the next generation. The second sign is a retreat into irrationality. Since people can no longer cope with the facts, they take

refuge in religious consolations. The Mayans took to offering sacrifices.

Archeologists have uncovered gruesome evidence of human sacrifice on a vast scale. It seems that, unable to solve their problems rationally, the Mayans focused on placating the gods by manically making offerings to them. So apparently did the Khmer.

Which makes the case of Jews and Judaism fascinating. They faced two centuries of crisis under Roman rule between Pompey's conquest in 63 BCE and the collapse of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 CE. They were hopelessly factionalised. Long before the Great Rebellion against Rome and the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews were expecting some major cataclysm.

What is remarkable is that they did not focus obsessively on sacrifices, like the Mayans and the Khmer. Instead they focused on finding substitutes for sacrifice. One was gemillat chassadim, acts of kindness. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai comforted Rabbi Joshua, who wondered how Israel would atone for its sins without sacrifices, with the words, "My son we have another atonement as effective as this: acts of kindness, as it is written (Hosea 6:6), 'I desire kindness and not sacrifice'" (Avot deRabbi Natan 8).

Another was Torah study. The sages interpreted Malachi's words (1:11), "In every place offerings are presented to My name," to refer to scholars who study the laws of sacrifice. (Menachot 100a). "One who recites the order of sacrifices is as if he had brought them" (Ta'anit 27b).

Another was prayer. Hosea said, "Take words with you and return to the Lord... We will offer our lips as sacrifices of bulls" (Hos. 14:2-3), implying that words could take the place of sacrifice. "He who prays in the house of prayer is as if he brought a pure oblation." (Yerushlami, Perek 5 Halacha 1)

Yet another was teshuvah. The Psalm (51:19) says "the sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit." From this the sages inferred that "if a person repents it is accounted to him as if he had gone up to Jerusalem and built the Temple and the altar and offered on it all the sacrifices ordained in the Torah" (Vayikra Rabbah 7:2)

A fifth was fasting. Since going without food diminished a person's fat and blood, it counted as a substitute for the fat and blood of a sacrifice (Berakhot 17a). A sixth was hospitality. "As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel, but now a person's

table atones for him" (Berakhot 55a). And so on.

What is striking in hindsight is how, rather than clinging obsessively to the past, sages like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai thought forward to a worst-case-scenario future. The great question raised by Tzav, which is all about different kinds of sacrifice, is not "Why were sacrifices commanded in the first place?" but rather, given how central they were to the religious life of Israel in Temple times, how did Judaism survive without them?

The short answer is that overwhelmingly the prophets, the sages, and the Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages realised that sacrifices were symbolic enactments of processes of mind, heart and deed that could be expressed in other ways as well. We can encounter the will of God by Torah study, engaging in the service of God by prayer, making financial sacrifice by charity, creating sacred fellowship by hospitality and so on.

Jews did not abandon the past. We still refer constantly to the sacrifices in our prayers. But they did not cling to the past. Nor did they take refuge in irrationality. They thought through the future and created institutions like the synagogue and house of study and school that could be built anywhere and sustain Jewish identity even in the most adverse conditions.

That is no small achievement. The world's greatest civilisations have all, in time, become extinct while Judaism has always survived. In one sense that was surely Divine Providence. But in another it was the foresight of people like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai who resisted cognitive breakdown, created solutions today for the problems of tomorrow, who did not seek refuge in the irrational, and who quietly built the Jewish future.

Surely there is a lesson here for the Jewish people today: Plan generations ahead. Think at least 25 years into the future. Contemplate worst-case scenarios. Ask what we would do, if... What saved the Jewish people was their ability, despite their deep and abiding faith, never to let go of rational thought, and despite their loyalty to the past, to keep planning for the future. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l ©2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Toras Lights

“**A**nd the Lord spoke to Moses saying: ‘Command Aaron and his sons, saying, this is the law of the burnt offering...’” (Leviticus 6:1-2) When we first encountered the concept of animal sacrifices in the book of Leviticus, we explored in depth the views of Maimonides and Nahmanides. Maimonides, in his classic work, *Guide for the Perplexed*, explained that the purpose of these sacrifices was in order to distance the

Jewish people from idolatry.

After all, having just emerged from Egypt, it was natural that their spirits remained chained to an idolatrous system of sacrificial worship. Hence, Maimonides argues that the Israelites were so accustomed to the practice of animal sacrifices and the burning of incense that when the time arrived to create a new model of worship, out of necessity God based it on the Egyptian system which they had known.

“Because it is impossible to move suddenly from one extreme to the other... divine wisdom... could not command that [the Israelites] leave all of those ways of worship, depart from them and nullify them. For such [a demand] would have been something that no human mind could expect, given the nature of the human being who is always drawn to that to which he is accustomed. Therefore God retained the sacrificial acts, but transformed them into means rather than ends, declaring that they must become the implements for directing all such energies and activities into the worship of the one true God of the Universe.” (*Guide for the Perplexed*, Part iii, Chap. 32)

Perhaps another way of interpreting the Maimonidean position can be extracted from a striking Talmudic passage in Tractate Yoma. There we are told how the Jewish people complain to the Almighty that the inclination of idolatry has destroyed the Temple, burned down the Sanctuary, killed all the righteous, exiled the Israelites from their land, and – to add insult to injury – “...it is still dancing amongst us.” They request that it be vanquished. The Almighty accedes to their desire, and after a fast of three days and three nights, God allows them to destroy the evil inclination towards idolatry. And what is the object they destroyed?

“He came forth in the image of a lion of fire emerging from the Holy of Holies.” (Yoma 69b)

What a strange description for the evil inclination of idolatry, “a lion of fire emerging from the Holy of Holies!” The famous interpreter of Aggadot (Talmudic legends) Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555–1631), known as the Maharsha, apparently troubled by what appears to be such a positive image of evil idolatry, explains that this refers to the zodiac sign Leo (the lion), which rules the heavens during the Hebrew month of Av, when the holy Temple was destroyed. And indeed, the first Temple was destroyed largely because of the idolatrous practices of the Israelites.

The Hassidic master Rabbi Zadok Hakohen of Lublin is likewise surprised by the Talmudic description. After all, the lion is a most respected Jewish symbol, representing the majesty of Judah who is thrice identified with a lion in Jacob’s blessings:

“Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as a lioness; who shall raise him?” (Genesis 49:9)

The lion is also an aspect of the divine merkava

(chariot) in the vision of Ezekiel, and is generally depicted on the ark curtains (parokhet) guarding the Torah. Moreover, the Holy of Holies would hardly be a proper home for the evil inclination of idolatry.

And so he suggests that the message of the Talmudic passage is that every aspect of creation – including idolatry – has its roots in sanctity. When we reflect upon the various gods of the ancient world – the Sun and the Moon, Herculean strength, Zeusian power and Aphroditian beauty – they are all aspects of the physical world and the instinctive drives which are fundamental to the world around us even today.

One response to these physical and human drives is the ascetic option, denigrating and attempting to root out all physicality because of the dangers which can follow from uncontrolled addiction to their urges. This, however, has never been the Jewish response.

After all, the Almighty did not create us as disembodied spirits or ethereal intellects. The physical side of our beings must have value if it was created by God. The challenge is to direct – or sublimate – our instinctive drives properly, to see them as means and not ends, not to deny them but to ennoble them, and to utilize them in the service of the divine.

This may well be the true meaning of Maimonides' words.

When the Jews left Egypt, they still carried with them the imprint of Egyptian idolatries, the myriad of gods including manifestations of nature (the sun) and beasts, which they held up as ideals. According to Maimonides, Leviticus is the history of how God redirected these idolatrous energies, teaching the Jews to build a Sanctuary as a means toward divine service, to sanctify sexual energy within the context of marriage and family, to utilize strength and power in order to recreate society in the divine kingship.

The fact of the matter is that what was true at the time when the Jews left Egypt has not necessarily changed to this day, and quite likely may never change. And therefore the Maimonidean position regarding the animal sacrifices – to wean the Israelites away from their previous Egyptian passions – is not a temporary solution for a particular generation; we are still in need of the directed discipline which will enable us to direct and ennoble our drives and passions to the service of the God of compassion and justice.

Textual evidence for this can be found at the end of the Talmudic passage we quoted earlier. The prophet cleverly warns the Israelites, after the evil instinct was given over into their hands: "Remember, if you kill him, the world will be destroyed" (Ibid). And so we read how they imprisoned the evil desire, and after three days not one egg could be found in the Land of Israel; apparently, without the sexual attraction between male and female, creation cannot exist. Indeed, the evil instinct is a "lion of fire" which can destroy or purify, depending upon how this natural force is utilized.

It may very well be that what Maimonides understood about the generation which left Egypt may turn out to be an eternal law of human nature: Our passions are not to be destroyed but are to be directed, are not to be consumed but are to be consecrated.

The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. ©2024 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The entire thrust of Torah life lies in the word tzav which informs us as the title of the parsha of this week. Tzav means command, order, instruct. It allows little leeway for individual creativity in the performance of ritual and commandments.

The values of Torah life come with an instruction manual. And just as the wonderful gadgets of technology in our lives require adherence to the manual that accompanies each device, in order for it to operate effectively, so too the Torah in the spiritual realm of Judaism requires adherence to specific instructions.

It is not for naught that any and all of the blessings that were composed by the rabbis to be recited before the performance of a mitzvah contains the word v'tzivanu – and He has commanded us, for the word mitzvah itself, which we usually translate in terms of being a good deed, literally means something which has been commanded.

It is this recognition of being commanded, of following the instruction manual of the Torah in a committed and punctilious fashion that defines Judaism throughout the ages. In today's world there are many who seek to "improve" upon the Torah. They have written a new and ever changing manual of instructions using such sweet sounding terms as "relevant" "progressive" "attractive" to describe prayer services, Torah commandments and Jewish values.

The fault line in Jewish life today remains, as it always has been, this acceptance or rejection of the concept of v'tzivanu. But Jewish history teaches us that none of this tinkering with that concept survives the passage of time and the ever changing mores of human society. It is only the old instructional manual that still stands and preserves us after all else has passed from the scene.

The concept of v'tzivanu rubs us the wrong way. We are by nature rebellious against authority imposed upon us by others. From infancy onward we demand to do it all by ourselves, when and how we wish. We can sense what the rabbis meant when they said that the people of Israel accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai and they felt that the mountain hung over their heads as a terrible and forced burden.

Here they were going to be commanded to do

things in certain exact way, to make the Torah's values supreme over their own personal desires, logic and way of life. But they were warned then that abandoning the Torah and not following the instructional manual would bring personal and national problems, tragedies, defections and harsh judgments.

The mountain still hangs over our heads as we are witness to this fact in so many facets of our lives. So again we are brought full circle to the idea of tzav and v'tzivanu. The concept of tzav as promulgated in this week's parsha is not addressed solely to Aaron and his descendants but it is part of the heritage of Judaism for all Jews and for all who wish to witness Jewish continuity in their families and the Jewish people as a whole. ©2024 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

A more general understanding of the sacrificial service may flow when considering an important aspect of covenant, the contractual partnership between God and His people.

The two major covenants in the Torah are the covenant of the pieces and the covenant at Sinai. Both are accompanied by korbanot (sacrifices). In the covenant of the pieces, Abraham splits animals in half and prepares fowl – symbolic, according to Nachmanides, of the future Temple sacrificial service (Genesis 15:9, 10). And at Sinai, the Israelites “brought up elevation offerings...and feast offerings to the Lord” (Exodus 24:5). In a similar fashion, the sacrifices offered in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple can be viewed as celebrations of our covenantal relationship with God.

Not coincidentally, salt was always used on the korban and was called brit melach (literally, “the covenant of salt”; Leviticus 2:13). As salt gives flavor to food and maintains its freshness, so, it is hoped, the korban will promote an enduring and meaningful relationship with God. As Rabbi Joshua Berman writes in his book *The Temple*, “[Salt marks] the eternal nature of the covenant... [It is] a statement about the lasting duration of the covenantal bond.”

Minchah (the flour offering) and nesachim (wine libations) covenantally symbolize the importance of tradition coupled with freshness (6:8). The best wine is old and rooted in the past. The best flour is new and fresh. At times, the minchah was mixed with frankincense and oil. The frankincense testified to the sweetness of the covenant as it was used to generate a “sweet savor” (2:2); the oil reflected the covenant's importance since it was used to anoint holy and royal people and objects.

More broadly, the Shabbat and holiday meals follow the pattern of the sacrificial service. We begin the

festive meal with Kiddush over wine, reminiscent of the wine libation; break challah, reminiscent of the meal offering; sprinkle salt, reminiscent of the “covenant of salt;” and then sit down for a lavish meal reminiscent of the ancient offerings.

Other similarities exist as well: we wash hands before the meal, as hands were washed at the kiyor (Temple laver); we sing zemirot (songs), as the Levites lifted their voices in melodic praise of God. Finally, we recite the Grace after Meals, which includes the hope that the Messiah come, heralded by the rebuilding of the Temple.

In no small measure, therefore, Shabbat and festive meals turn our homes into mini-temples where we celebrate our love for God and God's love for us, proclaiming that our covenantal relationship with God was, is, and will always be. ©2024 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Consuming Blood

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The Torah prohibits the consumption of blood and imposes the punishment of *karet* (excision) on anyone who disregards the prohibition. However, there is a disagreement about the minimum amount a person must consume to become liable to this punishment. Most sources state that the minimum is the volume of a *kezayit* (an olive, approximately 20cc). However, in *Yevamot* 114b, the minimum amount given is a *revi'it* (approximately 86cc) – four times the volume of an olive.

In *Responsa Binyan Tzion* (#49), Rav Yaakov Ettlinger was asked a question relating to this law. A person was ill, and was directed by his doctor to drink animal blood daily. To avoid doing something normally punishable by *karet*, Rav Ettlinger advised him to eat less than the minimum amount required for liability. However, it was unclear to the rabbi whether this minimum was a *kezayit* or a *revi'it*. Some say that the two different measurements apply to two different cases: one is the minimum for eating coagulated blood, and the other for free-flowing blood. However, Rav Ettlinger rejected this distinction.

We may resolve this dispute with a text recently printed by Yad HaRav Herzog (publisher of this book), which lists variant readings of Talmudic texts. There we find that even though the minimum amount is a *revi'it* in our standard Vilna Talmud version of *Yevamot* (as well as in the Soncino and Venice Talmuds, which were the basis of the Vilna Talmud), nevertheless, in six manuscripts the amount that appears is a *kezayit*. The text found in *Beit HaBechirah* of the Meiri (1249-1306),

which was not available in the time of Rav Ettlinger, reads *kezayit* as well.

Now that we are aware of these textual variants, we can easily resolve the contradiction without resorting to casuistic distinctions (*pilpulim*). ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

This is the offering of Aharon and his sons... a tenth of an epha of fine flour, always, half in the morning and half in the evening." (Vayikra 6:13)

As the Torah goes through the various korbanos, it comes to the korban mincha. In most cases it is a voluntary offering, serving the purpose of finding favor in Hashem's eyes.

The Kohain Gadol, however, had a daily obligation to bring this korban mincha from the day he was anointed as the Kohain Gadol. Regular Kohanim had the obligation of bringing this korban on the first day they did the Avoda, and it was called the Minchas Chinuch, representing the preparation for Hashem's service. The first time a Kohain or Kohain Gadol served, they brought 1/10th an epha of flour for their offering.

Going forward, as the Kohain Gadol brought this Korban each day, there was something unusual about it. As we see, the Torah says that half (1/20th of an epha) was brought in the morning, and half in the evening. That is different from what the other Kohanim brought. Then, we learn in Mesechta Menachos that the Kohain could not bring 1/20th of an epha from home and offer it in the morning, and bring another 1/20th in the afternoon. He had to offer the first half from a complete measure, then wait for evening and offer the other half.

If, in the interim, the remainder become impure, he would bring another 1/10th of an epha, offer half of that in the evening, and dispose of the remainder. The half being offered had to come from a whole measure.

Why did the Kohain Gadol have to split his offering, and why did the half have to come from a whole measure, if he only needed the remaining 1/20th for the afternoon offering?

The Korban Mincha atoned for negative character traits, and the Kohanim were supposed to help the Jewish People rise above their base natures. Therefore, all Kohanim offered a Mincha at the outset, to atone for their own negative traits and urge them to work on them. The Kohain Gadol needed to do this every day, and dividing the offering in half offered an extra level of atonement through reflection.

The Kohanim witnessed when the Jews came to bring sin offerings. They saw them bring offerings to come close to Hashem, or when they were thankful for a special salvation. In other words, they witnessed Jews at all stages of their personal journeys.

When the Kohain brought half in the morning, he recognized his job wasn't done. Then, he understood the

challenges of protecting the remainder throughout the day, and if it was ruined, he started over. This instilled in him the softness of heart to give the Jews a chance to make their mistakes and come back from them, and it was a message he needed to hear every single day. Isn't it one we would do well to hear also?

R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once came across a man in shul who was rushing through the davening and mumbling so much that his speech was unintelligible. He walked over to the man and made some garbled sounds. "I'm sorry," said the fellow, "but I didn't understand you." Replied R' Levi Yitzchak, "That's what you sound like when you daven. You should speak more clearly so Hashem can understand what you are saying."

"That's not really necessary," replied the man. "When an infant makes unintelligible sounds, its father and mother know what each sound means. One means it is hungry, another that it needs to be held. Hashem is our Father and He understands us even if no one else does."

R' Levi Yitzchak, well known for his love of Jews, was taken aback by this man's answer and a rush of warmth surged through him. This answer made him ecstatic and he embraced the man warmly for the insight he had been given. ©2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Among the various korbanos called shelamim, two are very limited regarding when their meat and accompaniments must be consumed -- the day they are offered. Regular shelamim are permitted double that window of time.

The two are the korban Pesach and, in our parsha, the korban todah, the "thanksgiving" offering. The latter, like the former, is offered in response to having been saved from a dire situation. The Gemara (Brachos 54b), citing Tehillim 107, gives the examples of 1) going to sea, 2) traveling in a desert, 3) enduring a serious illness and 4) being confined to prison.

Interestingly, the Jewish national thanksgiving which is Pesach involves all of those categories. A sea had to be crossed, a desert, subsequently, had to be traveled, Egypt is described as having been a virtual prison, and the Jewish people are described as having sunk to the lowest spiritual level in Egypt -- a sickness of the national soul.

Why the one-day limit? Rav Yitzchak Meir Alter, the Gerer Rebbe known as the Chidushei HaRim, explains that it is to impress upon the offeror -- and all of us -- that heavenly salvations are daily occurrences. Whether we perceive them or not.

All of us can recall close calls we've had in our pasts. Each was a salvation.

But getting up in the morning rather than expiring in our sleep is also a salvation. Making our way through

our day without tripping and hurting ourselves or being mugged or worse is a salvation. Driving from point A to point B without an interaction with a drunk driver is a salvation...

As we recite in Modim, the Amidah's bracha of "acknowledgment" or "thanksgiving": "[We thank You] for Your miracles that are with us every day..."

So needing to eat the korban todah within one day -- according to the chachamim, in order to avoid problems, by midnight -- impresses us with the constancy of Hashem's kindnesses.

Something to think about on the seder nights as we rush to consume the afikoman -- the stand-in for the korban Pesach -- before midnight. ©2024 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Jewish Geography

Seder Vayikra opens with G-d calling Moshe from the Mishkan (Vayikra 1:1), and telling him to speak to the Children of Israel (1:2) about the offerings to be brought there. The second Parasha, Tzav, also teaches about the offerings, but these details are directed towards the Kohanim (6:2), not the nation as a whole.

There's another possible difference as well. Whereas Parashas Vayikra was taught in the Mishkan, Parashas Tzav seems to have been taught on Mt. Sinai (7:37/38), which means it was taught before the Mishkan was constructed (since G-d's communication with Moshe shifted to the Mishkan after it was built and operational). The end of Parashas Tzav (8:1-36) was certainly taught before Parashas Vayikra (see Rashi on 8:2), as it describes what to do during the seven days of training, leading up to the Mishkan becoming operational. It therefore makes sense for the chronological switch (from what happened after the Mishkan was already operational to what happened before it became operational) to occur at the beginning of Parashas Tzav. And since the Kohanim were taught how to bring the offerings during those seven days (the *שבועת ימי המלאים*), these instructions had to be shared before the Mishkan was fully operational (which was on the "eighth day"). Nevertheless, there are reasons to question whether the first part of Parashas Tzav was really taught before Parashas Vayikra.

First of all, the details in Parashas Tzav are presented as if the Kohanim were already familiar with the offerings. The format, "this is how [this offering] was brought" (e.g. *זאת תורת העולה*), indicates that the Kohanim had already been taught about each offering, with further details being shared now. Additionally, the *שלמים* is referenced (6:5) even though it wasn't mentioned until later in the Parasha (7:11), indicating that the Kohanim were already aware of this type of offering. This works if Parashas Vayikra was taught before Parashas Tzav (as the offerings were taught there), but since Parashas Vayikra was taught in the

Mishkan and Parashas Tzav was taught at Sinai, Parashas Tzav must have been taught before Parashas Vayikra. What's going on?

R' Akiva's opinion (Zevachim 115b) is that the details of all the Mitzvos were taught at Sinai and repeated in the Mishkan, so the details shared in Parashas Vayikra and Parashas Tzav were taught in both places. Therefore, even though Parashas Vayikra was taught in the Mishkan, the details taught there had already been taught at Sinai, and that previous teaching is what's being referred to in Parashas Tzav. According to R' Yishmael, who says only the general concepts were taught at Sinai, with the details first taught in the Mishkan, the details taught in Parashas Vayikra -- which were obviously taught in the Mishkan -- had to have also been taught earlier, at Sinai, so that Moshe could teach them to the Kohanim during the seven days of training (before the Mishkan was built). The question we are left with is why Parashas Tzav presents the details as they were taught at Sinai rather than continuing from where Parashas Vayikra left off, with Moshe being taught them in the Mishkan (since both were taught in both places).

There's a well-known discussion regarding when the Mishkan was first commanded. Some (e.g. the Ba'alay Tosfos, Ibn Ezra and Ramban) say Parashas Terumah wasn't just written in the Torah earlier than the narrative of the golden calf, but was also taught to Moshe before the nation sinned. Others (e.g. Sefornu and the way most understand Rashi) say Moshe was only commanded to build the Mishkan after the golden calf, despite it being written in the Torah earlier. However, even according to those who say it was commanded before the sin, not everything was the same afterwards. The text of the Luchos given before the sin was different from the text of the Luchos given after the sin (compare Shemos 20:2-14 with Devarim 5:6-18; see Nesivos/Nachalas Yaakov and Beis HaLevi). And it wasn't just the words that were different; whereas G-d Himself carved out the first set of Luchos (Shemos 32:16), Moshe carved out the second set (34:1). Because the first born participated in the sin of the golden calf while the Tribe of Levi did not, the Levi'im replaced the first born in the Temple service (see Rashi on Bamidbar 3:12). The pillars of the Mishkan's doorway were originally supposed to be completely coated in gold (Shemos 26:37), but when they were made, only their tops were coated with gold, with the rest decorated with gold (36:38, see <https://tinyurl.com/2pzs7car>). Some suggest that the golden altar wasn't commanded with the rest of the Mishkan's vessels in Parashas Terumah, but commanded at the end of Parashas Tetzaveh instead, because it wasn't part of the original plan, added only after the sin of the golden calf (see <https://tinyurl.com/42btrpk4>).

Some offerings were affected too. Ramban (Vayikra 9:2) says the special offerings brought on the "eighth day" only became necessary because of the sin

of the golden calf. But what about the offerings brought after the Mishkan was fully operational? Were they offered the same way they would have been had there been no golden calf, or was there an adjustment in how they were brought? If the change in the way the nation related to G-d after the sin manifested itself in the representation of the covenant (i.e. the differences between the two sets of Luchos), in the structure within which G-d dwelled amongst them (i.e. the pillars of the Mishkan's doorway), and in the representatives of the nation in the service (i.e. the Levi'im replacing the first born), did it also manifest itself in the service itself (besides the daily incense offering)? This might be what the Torah is addressing by telling us that these offerings were commanded on Mt. Sinai.

The details taught in the first part of Parashas Tzav were taught both on Mt. Sinai and in the Mishkan, but by pointing out that they were taught on Mt. Sinai, the Torah is telling us that despite other changes that occurred after the sin, the offerings themselves were brought the same way they would have been had there been no golden calf. "These are the laws that G-d commanded Moshe on Mt. Sinai" (Vayikra 7:38), before the sin of the golden calf. Despite other changes, the offerings, and the details of how they were brought, were exactly the same. ©2024 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

This Shabbos is also Parashas Parah. As we learn in Parashas Naso, a person who has become defiled by contact with the dead (no, not through a sance) is ineligible to eat from the Korban Pesach. By being sprinkled with the water of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer) was the process a person underwent to become ritually pure again. Hence, we recall that halachah in advance of Pesach.

The Parah Adumah is the quintessential chok -- statute. This means there is something about the mitzvah that defies human logic, but apparently not why a red heifer is the animal of choice, as Rashi explains: "A red cow: This can be compared to the son of a maidservant who dirtied the king's palace. They said, "Let his mother come and clean up the mess." Similarly, let the cow come and atone for the calf." (Rashi, Bamidbar 19:22)

Thus, the red heifer is the Divine response to the golden calf. Had they not built and worshipped the calf, the Jewish people would have remained immortal. The calf caused death and the impurity that results, so its "mother" has to clean up the "mess."

It's a nice explanation. It's also problematic. It sounds as if the mitzvah of Parah Adumah would not have existed had the Jewish people not sinned with the golden calf. But that is not the case since every mitzvah is eternal by definition, which means there always had to be such a mitzvah. How does this work with Rashi's

explanation?

The Leshem, when talking about the eternity of mitzvos, deals with a similar question. According to the Gemora, mitzvos will be battel -- nullified -- in Yemos HaMoshiach, the Messianic Era (Shabbos 151b). But how can eternal mitzvos ever not exist?

What the Gemora means, the Leshem explains, is not that the act of a mitzvah will no longer be performed. Rather, a mitzvah won't seem then like a mitzvah seems now, like a yoke and an obligation. With the yetzer hara gone completely (Succah 52a), a mitzvah will become second nature (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 4, Anaf 12, Siman 12).

The yetzer hara is basically bodily instinct, and mitzvos tend to go against it. This is how mitzvos help to spiritually refine a person. It's the Torah's way of taking a person's life's steering wheel out of the hands of the body and giving it to the soul, so they can become a Tzelem Elokim and live in the "image of God."

But the opportunity to achieve such refinement through our free will choices will end with the death of the yetzer hara and bodily instinct. At least the kind of instinct that tends to make personal comfort a priority over spiritual growth.

Rashi alludes to this same idea at the beginning of this week's parsha, on the verse: "Command -- Tzav -- Aharon and his sons, saying, 'This is the law of the burnt offering...'" (Vayikra 6:2)

Rashi comments: "The Torah especially needs to urge [people to fulfill mitzvos] where monetary loss is involved." (Rashi)

The fact that money is involved in a mitzvah instigates the yetzer hara of a person. The yetzer hara will spend all kinds of money on things that give the body instant gratification. But why spend money on a mitzvah, for which the reward won't follow until the World to Come? Not an easy sell to the yetzer hara.

That creates bodily resistance. It can be subtle, so subtle that even the person themselves doesn't realize they are being affected and held back. But on some level, a little less of the person is used for the mitzvah than is ideal.

Even for someone like Moshe Rabbeinu. There is a Shalshelas cantillation note above the word for, "and he slaughtered it" (Vayikra 8:23) towards the end of this week's parsha. In the three other places it occurs in the Torah, it hints to some kind of hesitation in the heart, something not recognized on the outside of the person.

Like Lot not wanting to leave Sdom with the angel despite its impending destruction.

Like Yosef not wanting to run from the wife of Potiphar despite the sin involved.

But what reason did Moshe have at the inauguration of Aharon and his sons into the Temple service, to hesitate?

Because he had known, ever since Parashas Tetzaveh, that great people were destined to die on that

day to sanctify the Name of God. He had assumed, until next week's parsha, that that was supposed to have been himself and Aharon. Could that not have easily been somewhat of a distraction during the mitzvah, a subtle one that we could only know about because of the Shalsheles?

As the Leshem explains, we learn Torah and perform mitzvos primarily to spiritually refine our bodies while rectifying our souls. This means training the body to stop resisting both, like teaching a child to grow up and do the more responsible thing for their own good and development. That takes will, lots of will.

But it won't any longer the moment God dispenses with the Sitra Achra and yetzer hara in Yemos HaMoshiach. Then the body will be happy to do any mitzvah. It will no longer have to be commanded.

This raises a question: If the Parah Adumah was always meant to be a mitzvah, was the golden calf destined to occur? This could suggest, yes: "Go and see how The Holy One, Blessed is He, when He created the world created the Angel of Death on the first day as well...Man was created on the sixth day, and yet death was blamed on him. What is this like? A man who decides that he wants to divorce his wife and writes her a document of divorce. He then goes home with it and looks for a pretext to give it to her.

"Prepare me a drink,' he tells her.

"She does, and taking it from her he says, 'Here is your divorce.'

"She asks him, 'Why?'

"He tells her, 'Leave my house! You made me a warm drink!' to which she replies, 'Were you able to know that I would prepare you a warm drink in advance that you wrote a divorce document and came home with it?'

"Similarly, Adam told The Holy One, Blessed is He, 'Master of the Universe, the Torah was with You for 2,000 years before You created the world...yet it says, 'This is the law when a man will die in a tent' (Bamidbar 19:14). If You had not planned death for Your creations, would You have written this? Rather, You just want to blame death on me!" (Tanchuma, Vayaishev 4)

In other words, the Midrash says, as much as Adam HaRishon seemed to have the choice to avoid sin and death, he didn't. He was destined to eat from the Aitz HaDa'as and to bring death into the world.

Not only this, but the Midrash continues: "It was similar concerning [the sale of] Yosef...Rav Yudan said, 'The Holy One, Blessed is He, wanted to carry out the decree of, 'Know that you shall surely be (strangers)' (Bereishis 15:13), and set it up that Ya'akov would love Yosef [more] so the brothers would hate him and sell him to Arabs, and they would all [eventually] go down to Egypt..." (Tanchuma, Vayaishev 4)

On one hand, this information is a relief. It takes away the need to find a good explanation for, how such great people could commit such not-so-great acts. On the other hand, it is disturbing because it implies that we

can be railroaded by Divine Providence down the wrong path...against our will.

One could argue that perhaps this idea only applies to specific events with great impact on Jewish history. Or, perhaps it is a deeper insight into free will itself, and how we're meant to use it.

One thing is for certain, we have free will. God told us so, and tradition teaches that we will be judged for our choices. You can question what free will is, or wonder if we have any. But when it comes to life, it would be wise to assume you have it and use it responsibly.

Something else we can be certain about is that though we have free will, we do not have absolute free will. Many choices are made for us by life itself, imposed upon us since so many things are out of our control. But then again, does that take away anything from the choice I made, as long as I believed at the time my choice could make a difference?

Let's face it, history is not random. God made it with a specific purpose in mind, and with a master plan to be fulfilled. He knows the future and doesn't make mistakes, so whatever He had in mind was as good as done once He started to think about it. This is true right down to every person who will ever exist and every decision they will ever make.

At the end of the day, though a person makes all kinds of plans, there is a good chance that they will not turn out as anticipated. We don't know the future, which allows us to live with the perception that our decisions can make a difference and direct the course of history. It's all we need to be able to make choices for which we will be held accountable.

This does not completely solve the mystery of free will, but who says we can at this time, or that we should? The Parah Adumah is a mitzvah with a message, and it reads: Some things you can understand while others you cannot. Understand what you can, but don't get bogged down and distracted by what you can't. Recognize the free will opportunity of every moment, and utilize it meaningfully. It will save you in this world and reward you in the next one. © 2024 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

